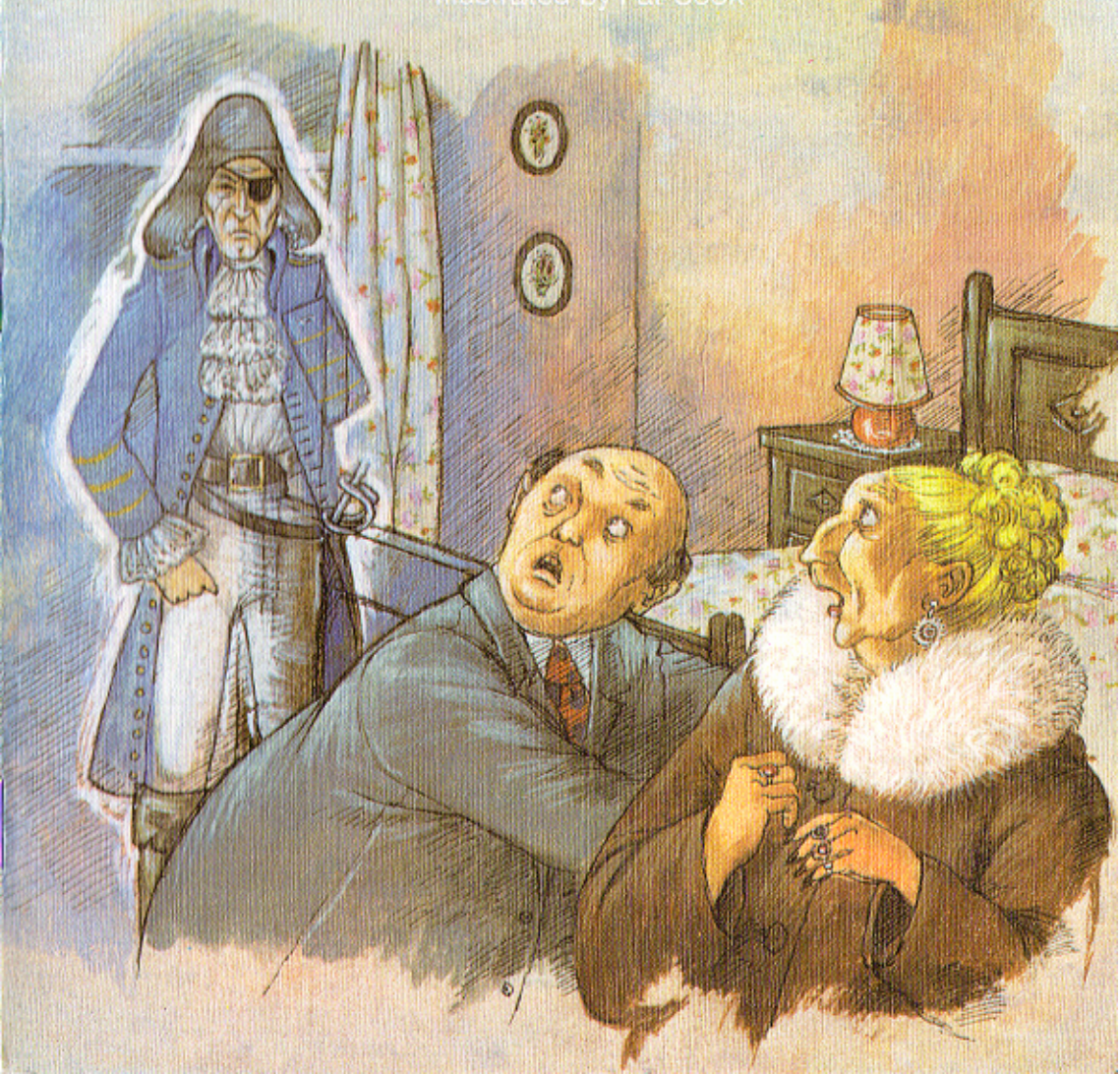


Tim and the Hidden People

# Captain Jory Lends a Hand

Sheila K. McCullagh

Illustrated by Pat Cook



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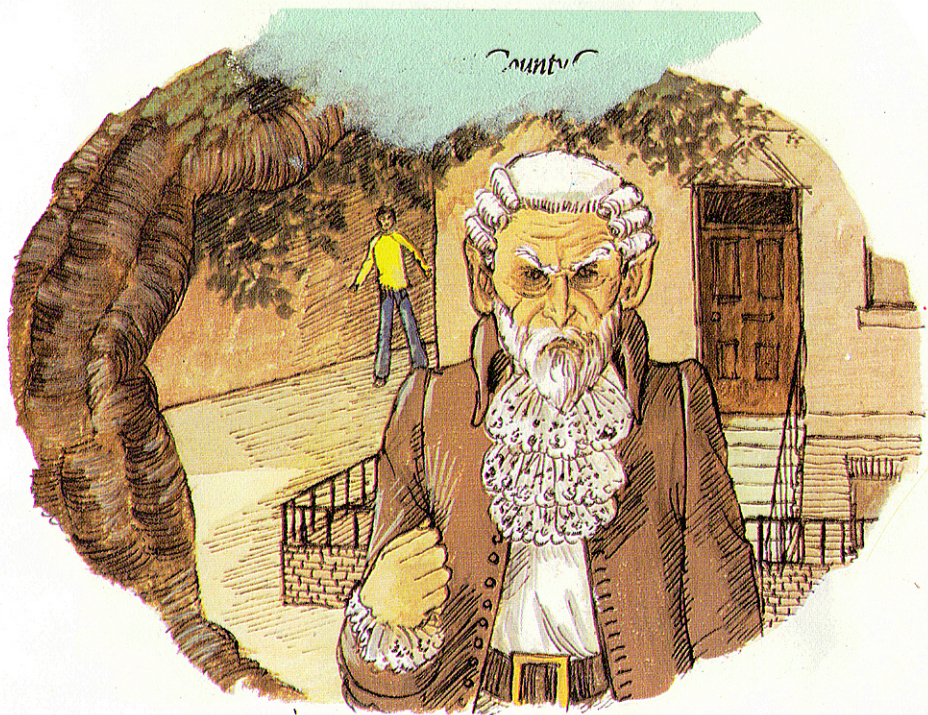
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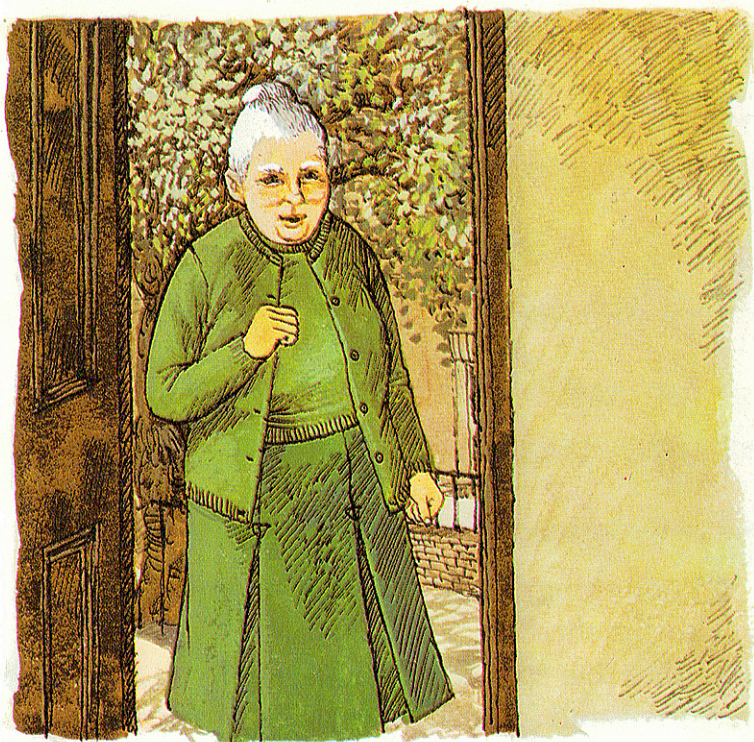




Tim was in the kitchen, helping Aunt May, when Miss Baker knocked at the front door.

Miss Baker was a little old lady who lived in a house across The Yard. Tim liked her. She was always baking, and she often gave him a cake. She often forgot her key, when she went out, and locked herself out of her house. So Tim was used to helping her, by climbing in at one of the windows.

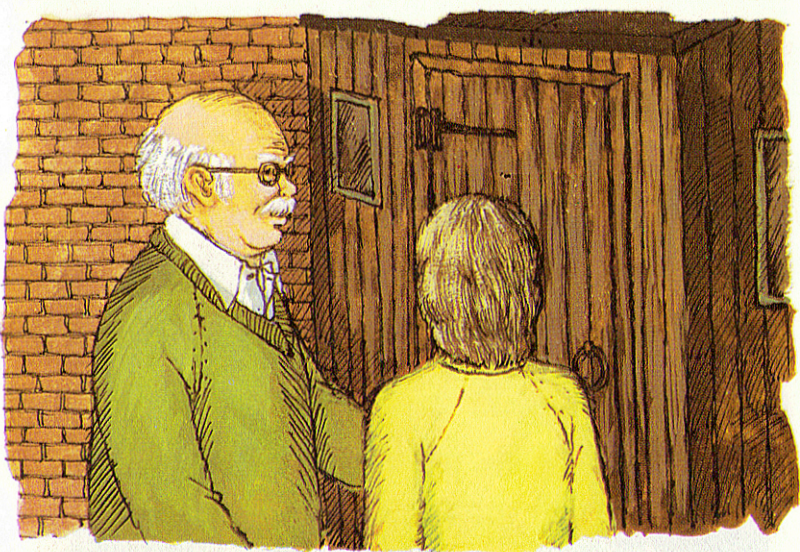




Miss Baker had forgotten her key again. "Tim," she said, when he opened the front door, "Tim, would you climb in for me? I don't know *where* I've left the key this time. We shall have to ask Mr. Berryman for his ladder, too. The windows downstairs are shut, but my bedroom window is open."

Miss Baker went back to her house, and Tim ran over to Mr. Berryman's.





“Poor thing,” said Mr. Berryman, as he went out to his shed to get the ladder. “The landlord is selling her house, Tim. She’s lived there all her life, and now she’ll have to move. He’s found a room for her somewhere. I don’t know where. Miss Baker has offered him all the money she has, to buy the house herself, too. But he thinks he can get more from someone else. It’s very hard on Miss Baker, at her time of life, poor thing.”

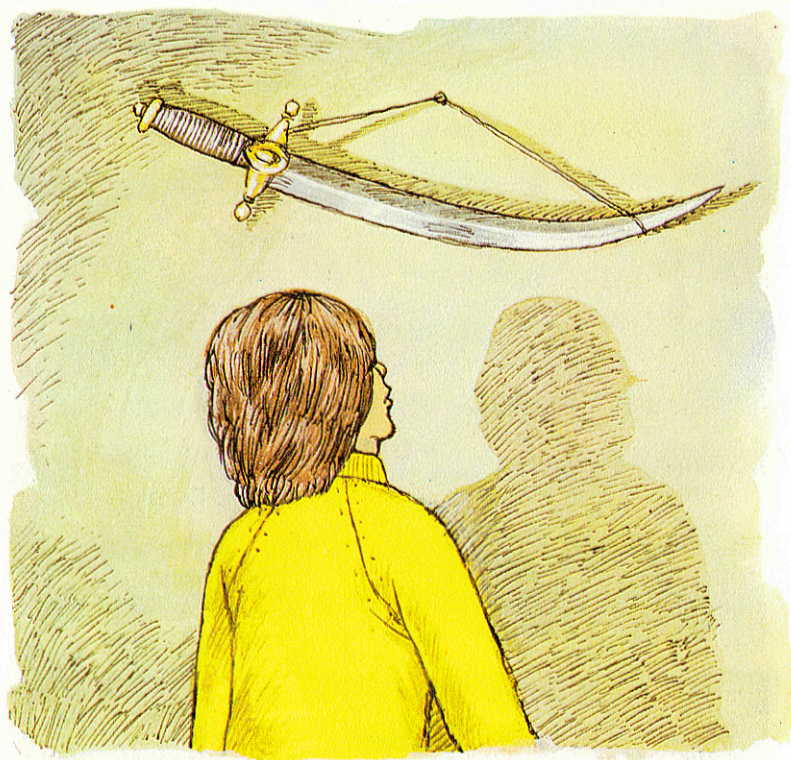
Miss Baker didn’t look a “poor thing”, because she had pink cheeks and white hair, and she was very plump, but Tim felt sorry for her.





Mr. Berryman helped Tim to carry the ladder. They set it up against the front of Miss Baker's house. Mr. Berryman put his foot on the bottom rung, and Tim climbed up to the window. He pushed it up and climbed inside.





He found himself in Miss Baker's bedroom. It was very clean and neat, and there were some flowers on a chest of drawers, but Tim didn't look around. He slipped out to the landing.

There was a cutlass hanging on the wall by the stairs.

Tim was so surprised to see it, that he stopped for a minute to look at it.



"You've been some time," said Mr. Berryman, as Tim opened the front door. "What kept you?"

"I stopped to look at the cutlass," said Tim.

"It belonged to my grandfather's grandfather," said Miss Baker. "I'll show it to you another day, Tim. The landlord is coming today, with the house agent. They're bringing someone to see the house this afternoon."

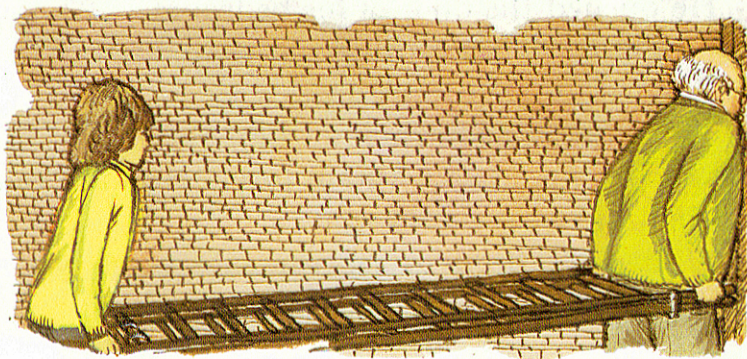
"You should leave the front door locked," said Mr. Berryman.

"It wouldn't do much good," said Miss Baker. "Not with the kind of landlord I've got."

Miss Baker went off to the kitchen, and came back with two little cakes, one for Tim and one for Mr. Berryman.

Tim put his in his pocket, and helped Mr. Berryman to carry the ladder back to his shed.

He was still eating his cake when he went back into his own house.





"That Miss Baker!" said Aunt May, as he went into the kitchen. "Giving you cakes again! Does she think I don't feed you? She's got the right name, she has—she's always baking. She's got nothing else to do."

"She's got a cutlass," said Tim. "She said it belonged to her grandfather's grandfather."

Aunt May sniffed. "She got it at the junk shop, I expect," she said.

"Mr. Berryman says she'll have to leave her house," said Tim. "The landlord's selling it."

"And if she does have to go, *she'll* be all right," said Aunt May. "Her father owned that shop on Bridge Street. She's got a bit of money put away. She's never had to work like the rest of us."

Aunt May banged the frying pan down on the table.

Tim slipped out, and went upstairs.

He opened the door of his bedroom.

Captain Jory was sitting in the wooden chair, puffing away at a long pipe.

Tim shut the door behind him.

"Well, Tim," said Captain Jory. "How are you getting on?"

"I haven't been to see the safe witch yet," said Tim. "I haven't had time."







"It's a good thing you haven't," said Captain Jory. "The stump people have joined the Highwayman at Hollow Hill. When you do go, look out for the stump people."

"Who are the stump people?" asked Tim.

"They're a strange people, Tim," said Captain Jory, resting his pipe on his knee. "They're invisible. Even I can't see them—except their eyes. They use old, dead tree stumps for bodies. Some of them use old posts, too, but the ones in the tree stumps are the worst: they've old roots and dead branches for arms and legs. Haven't you ever seen a tree stump a long way off, and thought it was somebody standing there? Well, sometimes it is and sometimes it isn't. Most often it's just a stump. But sometimes—*sometimes* one of the stump people is inside."

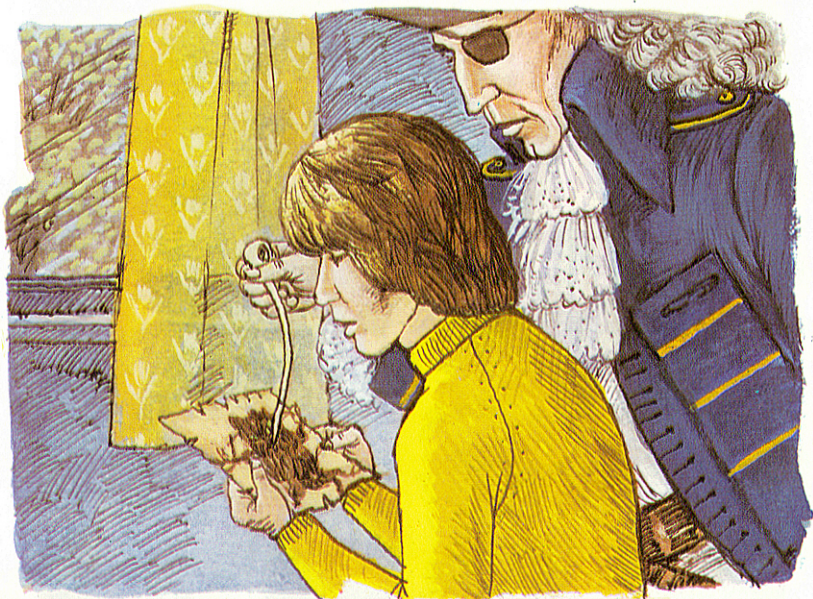
Captain Jory pulled a picture out of his pocket.

"Look at this," he said.









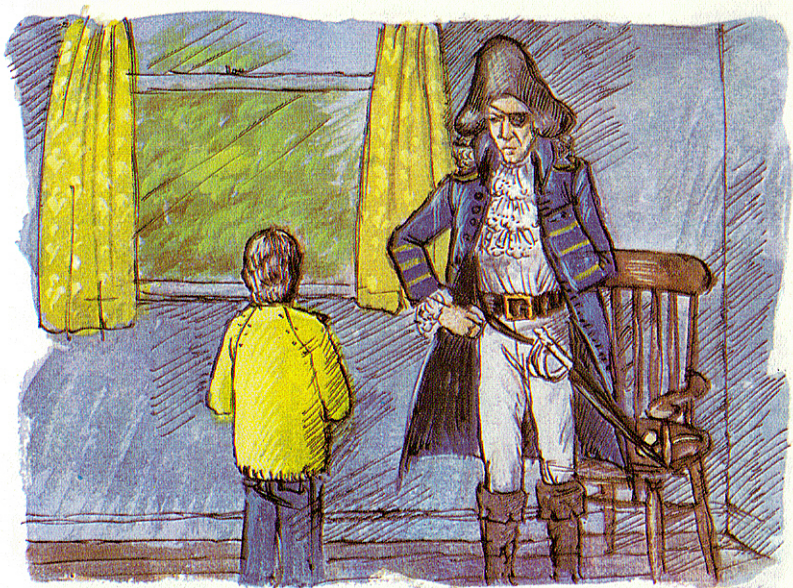
Tim looked at the picture.

"See the eyes, Tim?" said Captain Jory. "That's how you know them. When you see those eyes on a tree stump—watch out!"

Tim said nothing. He wished he was miles away. He wished that he had never seen Captain Jory, or said that he would help the Hidden People.

Captain Jory put down his pipe and put the picture back in his pocket. "You'll be all right, Tim," he said. "Perhaps you'll never see the stump people. But I heard they're about, and I thought I should warn you."





Tim nodded. His mouth felt dry, and he could think of nothing to say.

"You'll be all right once you've seen Melinda," said Captain Jory.

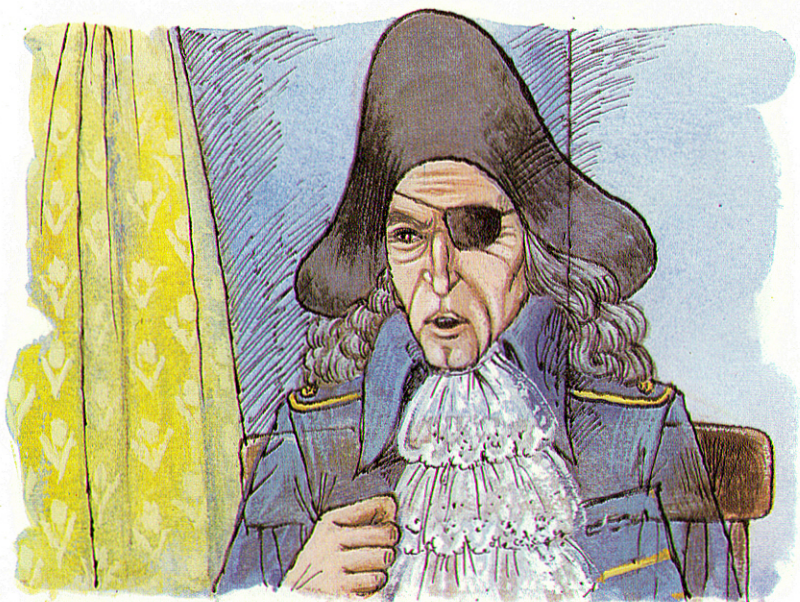
"When will Tobias take me there?" asked Tim.

Captain Jory shook his head. "You'll have to go there by yourself, Tim," he said. "Tobias won't fly a broomstick past Hollow Hill—not now."

"But tree stumps can't fly," said Tim.

"The wild witches can," said Captain Jory. "You'll be safer on the ground near Hollow Hill, Tim."





Tim wasn't at all sure about that, but he didn't say any more.

"What were you doing over the way?" asked Captain Jory, jerking his head towards the window.

Tim told him about Miss Baker.

"H'm," said Captain Jory, "I think I might lend a hand there. I keep a cutlass at Miss Baker's. You say the landlord is coming this afternoon?"

Tim nodded.

"I might just look in and see that house myself, Tim!"





Captain Jory smiled at Tim and nodded his head. He picked up his pipe, and went over to the door.

The door opened by itself.

Captain Jory stepped out on to the landing, and was gone.





Tim was out in The Yard that afternoon, when a big, shiny car drove in, and stopped outside Miss Baker's house.

Tim had seen the car before. It belonged to Mr. Gopp, the landlord.





Mr. Gopp got out, followed by a thin little man, a big man and a woman.

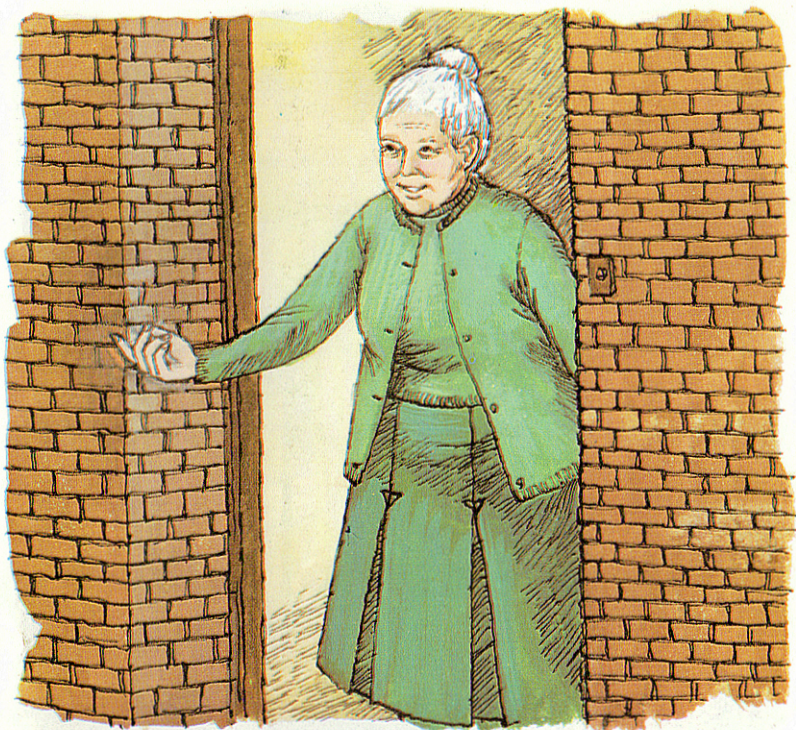
"They look as if they had lots more money than Miss Baker," thought Tim, as they went up the steps to Miss Baker's front door.

The thin little man rang the bell.

Miss Baker opened the door, and they went in.

The door shut behind them.





Tim was still standing there when the door opened again, and Miss Baker looked out.

"Come in, Tim," she called. "I'm just having tea."

"But what about Mr. Gopp?" asked Tim, going slowly across The Yard.

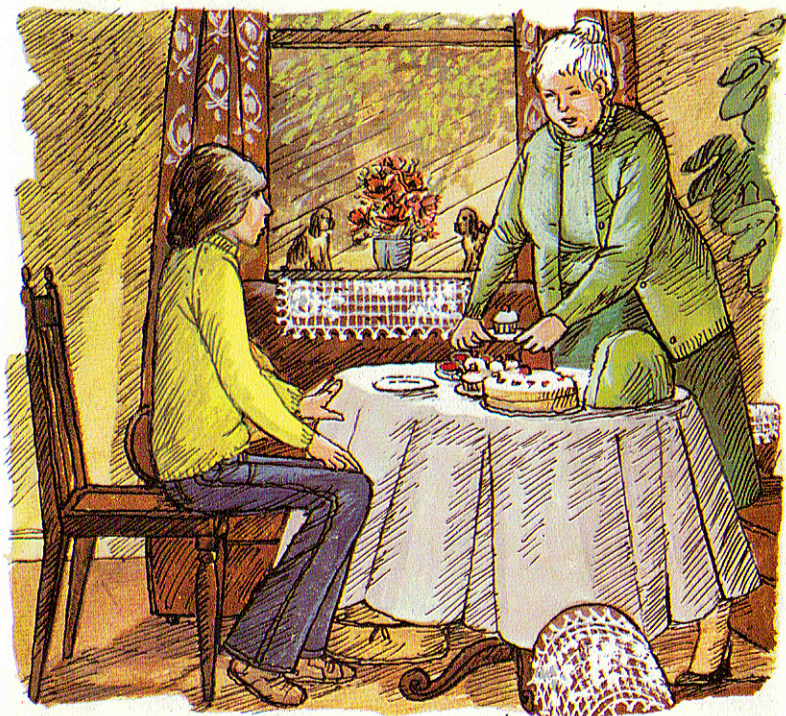
"Oh, he's taking them over the house," said Miss Baker. "I shan't be giving *them* any tea. They won't bother us, and I should be glad of a bit of company just now."





Miss Baker led the way into the front room, and Tim followed her carefully. You had to be careful in Miss Baker's front room. It was so full of furniture, that Tim always wondered how Miss Baker walked about without knocking anything over. (Miss Baker was a good cook, and Aunt May always said that anyone could see she didn't starve herself.)





There was tea on the table, with some jam tarts and two kinds of cake.

"Sit down, Tim," said Miss Baker.

Tim sat on the very edge of a chair.

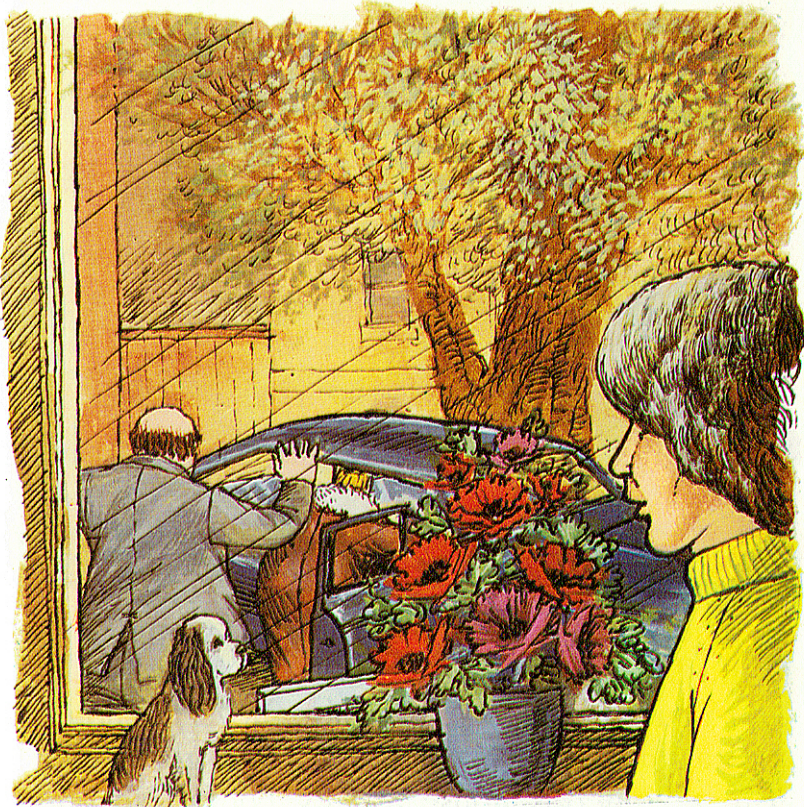
He heard a door shut outside in the hall, and steps going up the stairs.

Miss Baker handed him a cake. (She never bothered about bread and butter.)

"They'll be some time upstairs," she said.

But she was wrong.





There was a sudden scream in the room overhead, a yell, and the sound of people tumbling down the stairs.

Tim heard the front door open, and he ran to the window.

The big man and the woman half-jumped, half-fell down the steps, and into the car outside.





They heard the agent and Mr. Gopp in the hall. They were both shouting.

“You’ll never sell this house, never!” shouted the agent angrily. “Not with that ghost in it! I’m taking this house off my books. No one’s going to buy it now.”

“The old woman who lives here has never seen a ghost,” said Mr. Gopp. But even he sounded a bit shaken.

“Then let her buy it,” said the agent. “She offered you a price for it, didn’t she?”

They went out, slamming the front door behind them.





They were still shouting at each other as they got into the car, and drove off.

“Well!” said Miss Baker. “What was all that about?”

“I don’t know,” said Tim.  
But he did.





Tim was so full of cake when he left Miss Baker's that he thought he'd better go along the canal for a bit, before going home. Aunt May was getting a late tea ready, and she wouldn't be very pleased if he didn't eat it,

He went along to the bridge, and tossed stones into the water below until it was time to go home.

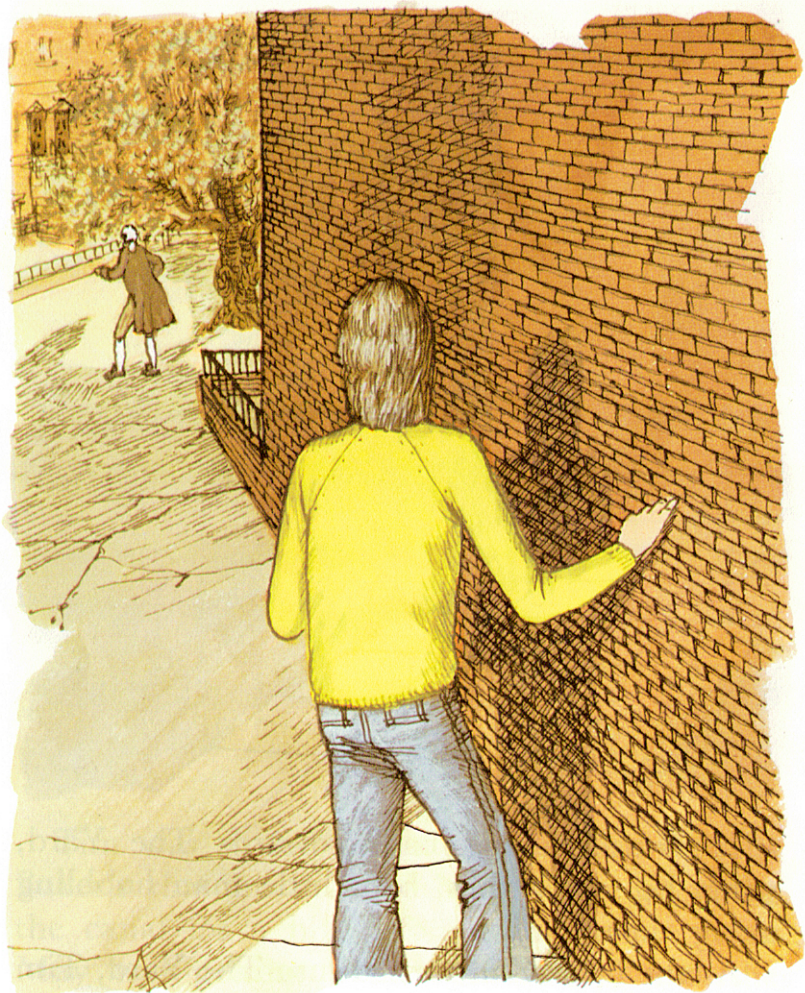




He was walking back towards The Yard, when he saw a thin, bent little man hobbling along ahead of him.

As the little man turned into The Yard, Tim saw his face. He had pointed ears, a pointed beard, and a long, thin nose. Tim was sure that he had seen the man before, but he couldn't remember where.





Tim ran along to the gap in the houses, which led to The Yard, and stood there, watching.

The thin little man was going from house to house, looking up at the windows.



Suddenly, Tim remembered where he had seen him before. He hadn't seen the man, but he had seen his face. His face was just like the face on the brass knocker, at the house of the safe witch.

The little man suddenly spun round.

He came back towards Tim.

"You might have told me you were there," he said, in a thin, cross voice. "But nobody ever helps me. Nobody."

"Who are you?" asked Tim.

"I forget. And it doesn't matter to you, anyway," said the little man, more crossly than before. "What do you care what my name is? Nobody cares. Everybody calls me Knocker, and that's all. It's so long since anybody said my name, that I've forgotten it. I've a message for you from Melinda. You're to go and see her at once."

"Tonight?" asked Tim.

"No, no, not tonight," said Knocker. "Tomorrow. You can go tonight if you like, for all I care. But you'd never get there at night, and Melinda wants to see you."

"How shall I get there?" asked Tim.





“How do I know?” said Knocker. “Walk, I should think. I had to walk here. But you’d better go. Melinda won’t like it, if you’re not there.”

“Why can’t I go tonight?” asked Tim.

“If you’ve no more sense than that, you’ll never get there at all, night or day,” said Knocker. “Anyway, I’ve told you.”

He hobbled off out of The Yard without another word.





Tim stood staring after him for some time. He was thinking hard. He remembered the road near Melinda's house, and Mr. Penny's lorry. He could walk along the canal bank most of the way, and he might get a bus back before it got dark. He didn't need Knocker to tell him not to be near Hollow Hill after dark.

Tim turned, and walked slowly into The Yard, back to the house and tea.





After tea, Tim went along to see Mr. Penny. Mr. Penny was just shutting up his shop.

“Hallo, Tim,” he said. “Want anything? I’m just closing.”

Tim shook his head. “Is there a bus along that road by your son’s house, Mr. Penny?” he asked.

“Yes,” said Mr. Penny. “There’s one out of town about eight o’clock in the morning, and one back to town about eight o’clock at night. Are you going out for the day?”





"I think so," said Tim.

"I'm going off that way myself about two o'clock tomorrow," said Mr. Penny. "You can come in the lorry with me if you like. How far are you going?"

"Just a bit further than your son's house, but not much," said Tim. "Thanks, Mr. Penny. Thanks very much. I'll be here."

He ran off, back to The Yard.



"I'll go tomorrow," Tim said to himself, as he went upstairs to bed. "If I go with Mr. Penny, I shall have lots of time to see Melinda, and catch the eight o'clock bus home. I shan't have to be out after dark."

He felt in his pocket for the pound note he had found. He wouldn't have to ask Aunt May for the bus fare.

Tim felt rather better that night as he climbed into bed. He would go and see Melinda tomorrow.





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1. Tim and Tobias
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# Flightpath to Reading B2



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